This is one of two panels to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, in keeping with this year’s theme: The future of humanitarian affairs: towards greater inclusiveness, coordination, interoperability and effectiveness.

**Background and theme**

Attacks on civilians have become recurrent features of today’s armed conflicts. Every day hundreds of innocent people are deliberately or recklessly killed, injured and tortured, often in violation of the most basic rules of international humanitarian law and with total impunity. Despite the Secretary-General’s repeated calls, explosive weapons are used in densely populated areas, in full knowledge that they will inevitably kill, injure or displace large numbers of civilians and destroy homes and infrastructure. Targeting schools and hospitals was once a taboo has become a method of warfare for many armed groups or government forces. Parties across conflicts repeatedly and often arbitrarily hinder access of people in need to humanitarian assistance. Respect for the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations and their emblems, which was once almost sacrosanct, has vanished. Attacks against humanitarian and healthcare personnel have reached record levels. Overall, in 2014, violence and other forms of persecution forced an average of 30,000 people per day to flee their homes. The number of people experiencing displacement as a result of conflict now exceeds 50 million, which is unprecedented in the post-World War II era. Far from being “collateral damage”, civilians’ death or suffering is the very purpose of attacks, sieges and denial of aid.

Alarmingly, the international community seems to have gotten used to it. Certainly, atrocities against civilians are nothing new; but the sense of apathy and paralysis in the international system in the face of inhumanity certainly is. Whereas there was outrage over Srebrenica, 20 years ago, today there is often silence and inertia. What can we do to counter this?

Upholding human dignity in all circumstances and protecting civilians from the impact of armed conflicts is not only in the interest of all of us; it is our moral imperative. It is what Member States have committed to achieve by signing the Charter of the United Nations; and it is the raison d’être of humanitarian organizations. But how can “we the people” translate those promises into reality? While there is no single solution to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, there are certainly concrete steps which can be taken. Speaking out systemically against violations of international humanitarian law, making sure there are consequences and holding perpetrators accountable is the least the international community could do and should do; what else?
Format
Chair: H.E. Ambassador Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Vice President of ECOSOC

Moderator: Mr. Stephen O’Brien, Emergency Relief Coordinator

Panelists:
- Ms. Fatou Bensouda, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court
- Mr. Pierre Krähenbühl, UNRWA Commissioner-General
- Ms. Sima Samar, Chair, Afghanistan Human Rights Commission
- Mr. Jon Snow, Anchor, Channel 4 News

Objectives
The High-Level Panel will aim at discussing the below topics:
• How can we counter the sense of apathy and inertia in the international community in the face of inhumanity?
• How can the UN and their Member States contribute to restore an environment more conducive to the protection of civilians?
• What concrete measures could we take to reduce violations of International Humanitarian Law by State and non-State parties and their impact on civilians?
• What is needed to improve accountability?

Intended outcomes/conclusions/recommendations
• Underline the urgency to enhance compliance with IHL and accountability for violations in order to better protect civilians;
• Lay the moral, political and legal responsibilities of different actors, including Member States, humanitarian actors, national NGOs to protect civilians;
• Promote concrete ideas / steps to enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflicts;